

Matsui Questions New Risk Assessment Standard that Restricts Sacramento's Eligibility for Federal Homeland Security Funds

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January 10, 2006

Tuesday, January 10, 2006

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Sacramento, CA – Congresswoman Doris O. Matsui (CA-5) sent a letter to Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff inquiring why Sacramento may no longer be eligible for high-risk funding from the Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) grant program. Additionally, the Congresswoman discussed the importance of this funding with some of Sacramento's emergency management officials on Monday, January 9, 2006. The text of the letter (pdf) follows: January 10, 2006 The Honorable Michael Chertoff

Secretary

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Chertoff:

The Department of Homeland Security recently released a list of 35 urban areas considered eligible to apply for funding through the FY 2006 Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI) program. Eleven additional areas, including Sacramento, the Congressional District I represent, were notified that their UASI funding may be terminated in future years if the Sacramento Urban Area does not meet the new risk assessment standards.

I am deeply concerned that the new assessment process will omit numerous sites of critical infrastructure and possible terrorist targets in the region. Such an assessment would put the Sacramento Urban Area at risk of losing UASI funds and I urge your further consideration of this matter. The Sacramento Urban Area has been comprised of eight cities in three counties; with a population of almost two million people the region is becoming denser each year.

Sacramento has much at risk and is home to California's Capitol which serves as a symbol of our great state. The city also lies just miles downstream from the Folsom Dam. Due to significant security concerns the road atop the dam

was closed in 2003 by the federal government after a terrorism risk assessment. If the dam was to be breached hundreds of thousands of lives and billions of dollars worth of property would be at risk. The area is also home to over thirty miles of light rail, an international airport and other major transportation hubs.

At this time the FBI's Sacramento Field Office has a significant number of terrorist investigations ongoing, well above the national average in numbers of cases and scope. Unfortunately, our area has also seen its share of attempted terrorist attacks. In 1999 militia members were arrested in a plot to blow up two propane tanks in Elk Grove, which resides in the UASI boundaries. If successful, the resulting firestorm from the 24 million gallon facility would have killed hundreds and damaged a large swath of residential and industrial neighborhoods. Additionally, in 2001 an 18 wheel truck was crashed into the State Capitol building, causing \$16.5 million dollars in damage.

Previous UASI funding has proven vital to our safety and has already been tapped to help us meet goals laid out in the Sacramento Urban Area Homeland Security Strategy. Funds have been spent on items such as gas mask filters, first responder training and communication equipment upgrades. Additionally, a Regional Terrorism Threat Assessment Center and regional training center is being built to help all law enforcement agencies prevent an attack.

As you know, press and government reports have noted that some local agencies have spent their money on wasteful purchases. Various government reviews have not raised any questions about how the Sacramento law enforcement agencies have been spending the funds. The police, fire, public health and other agencies that serve the Sacramento Urban Area have worked across jurisdictional boundaries and have become a true model for regional cooperation that others have tried to follow.

As noted above, I understand that there are new guidelines for eligibility for the UASI program, and I would like clarification about how Sacramento's risk assessment was determined. I believe it important that each region be evaluated for a wide range of threats. Sacramento is downstream from a major dam and the majority of neighborhoods and business districts sit behind levees, these are considerations, as well as a host of other transportation and critical sites that I believe should be factored in.

Ensuring that the City of Sacramento receives all necessary funding to keep it safe is one of my top priorities. Thank you for taking this matter under your consideration. I look forward to your response to these concerns.

Sincerely,

DORIS O. MATSUI

Member of Congress

cc: Ms. Pamela Turner, Assistant Secretary for Legislative Affairs, Dept. of Homeland Security,
Mayor Heather Fargo, City of Sacramento
Chief Albert Najera, Sacramento Police Department

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